

NIEHS/EPA Biomedical Career Symposium draws hundreds

By Monica Frazier

The 17th annual NIEHS Biomedical Career Symposium opened April 25 with a warm welcome from NIEHS Scientific Director Darryl Zeldin, M.D. An estimated 350 attendees, eager for professional advice on next steps in their careers, filled the meeting rooms at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) campus in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina.

Zeldin challenged participants to design and commit to a plan for transition to a rewarding career in the biomedical sciences. "For many of you, the decisions you make over the next year or two will shape your lives as scientists for decades to come," Zeldin said. "Better understanding of the various options available to you, and what it takes to pursue specific career paths, is absolutely essential for making those important decisions."

Transitions through networking

Kristin Gabor, Ph.D., co-chair of the event, reiterated Zeldin's remarks, noting that this year's symposium focused on successful transitions into a variety of career paths. One foundation for a career transition is the development of a professional network, which is why the committee invited **Alaina Levine**, (http://alainalevine.com/Alaina_G.html) president of Quantum Success Solutions and author of the upcoming book "Networking for Nerds," to deliver the keynote address.

Levine's talk, "Accessing Hidden Career Opportunities Through Networking and Reputation Management" set the tone for the day. Using a medley of stories from her own experiences - and her signature comedic style - Levine entertained the audience, while educating them on the value of networking and self-branding.

"Upwards of 90 percent of jobs are gotten through hidden opportunities, which are made available to you from networking," Levine said. She told how admiring the shoes of the woman next to her on a flight led to paying work - the shoes were on the feet of a congressman's wife who needed help using humor in her speeches.

"You need diverse influences and diverse sources of inspiration - people who can give you new ideas and help you solve the problems you are trying to solve in your scientific discipline," Levine added. "This diversity of sources comes from networking."

Something for everyone

The day was packed with sessions, including 10 expert panels from various career paths, 10 career development workshops, and a networking reception featuring exhibitors from local groups and companies.

"We sought out speakers on a range of topics to support career transitions, from how to network and how to interview, to what steps to take to land that job," said Gabor. "While we wanted our workshops to meet varied interests, the primary goal was to showcase the plethora of



Levine, who led highly-rated workshops at last year's symposium, informed and entertained attendees as she discussed the critical need for scientists to develop a professional network. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



Zeldin applauded the efforts of the 2014 career symposium planning committee. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)

opportunities available to those with a biomedical degree," she added.

Organizers also arranged for 25 professionals to review CVs and resumes of more than 175 participants. The reviewers were categorized so attendees could choose the most appropriate expert in their desired career path, whether industry, government, or academia.

Postdoc-led event

The annual event, which is planned, organized, and carried out by NIEHS and EPA postdoctoral fellows, was an impressive display of teamwork and dedication to educating the scientific community about career opportunities and advancement strategies.

Co-chairs Gabor and [Bethany Hsia, Ph.D.](#), led a 25-member committee (see [text box](#)), which began work last fall. Committee members selected and invited panelists, organized arts and photography, managed facility resources, and led social media advertisement, earning transferable skills and developing contacts that will help them in their own career development.

The committee's collaboration and effort was praised by [Tammy Collins, Ph.D.](#), director of the NIEHS Office of Fellows' Career Development. Collins assisted in behind-the-scenes planning and logistics, and the co-chairs noted that Collins' experience and advice were invaluable.

(Monica Frazier, Ph.D., is an Intramural Research Training Award fellow in the NIEHS Mechanisms of Mutation Group.)



John Vandenberg, Ph.D., Director of the EPA National Center for Environmental Assessment and Director for the Human Health Risk Assessment Program, welcomed participants to the EPA campus, noting the outstanding participation and excitement at the event. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



During the coffee break, Alexandria Marchi, Ph.D., right, and another attendee look through the symposium booklet, a shortened version of the lengthy program from previous years. One of the committee's priorities was to reduce the carbon footprint of the symposium. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



Lori Conlan, Ph.D., of the NIH Office of Intramural Training and Education, advised participants in her conflict management workshop on techniques for approaching difficult conversations. She then provided a chance to practice giving and receiving personal feedback. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



Melanie Jardim, Ph.D., right, of United Therapeutics, and Jeffrey Stumpf, Ph.D., former NIEHS postdoctoral fellow and now a writer at MedThink, took questions from the crowd during the Science Communication and Writing career panel. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



The planning committee relocated the coffee and snacks, funded by donations from NIEHS and EPA postdocs and staff, to the EPA Atrium this year, allowing a constant flurry of discussion between attendees and with exhibitors, both during breaks and the afternoon networking reception. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



According to Gabor and Hsia, the large number of volunteers on the career symposium planning committee, from NIEHS and EPA, allowed them to dedicate two members to outreach and social media advertising for the symposium. This was a major success, with symposium attendance up by more than 100 over last year. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)

17th Annual NIEHS Career Symposium Planning Committee	
Kristin Gabor, Ph.D. - Co-chair	Bethany Hsia, Ph.D. - Co-chair
Kelly Daughtry, Ph.D.	Shannon Farris, Ph.D.
Emmi Felker-Quinn, Ph.D.	Monica Frazier, Ph.D.
George Fromm, Ph.D.	Samuel Gattis, Ph.D.
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Melissa Hausburg, Ph.D.	Kristin Lichti-Kaiser, Ph.D.
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Samantha Snow, Ph.D.	Natacha Steinckwich-Besancon, Ph.D.
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Staton Wade Ph.D.	Jeremy Weaver, Ph.D.
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